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HERSETH SANDLIN INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO HELP RURAL COMMUNITY FLOOD RESPONSE

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Washington, DC (September 23, 2010)-Today, U.S. Representative Stephanie Herseth Sandlin introduced the Rural Flood Mitigation and Recovery Act of 2010. The legislation is the direct product and result of information gathered by Rep. Herseth Sandlin during nine community meetings she hosted across South Dakota in response to the devastating flooding experienced in South Dakota. The meetings were held in Aberdeen, Britton, Waubay, Westport, Sisseton, Milbank, Huron, Centerville and Corsica.

At these meetings, Rep. Herseth Sandlin discussed with South Dakota citizens and officials options for helping South Dakotans could work together to best manage the impact of flooding. The need for improved access to flood mitigation resources arose as a critical concern at these meetings, and the Rural Flood Mitigation and Recovery Act is a response to those concerns.

Rep. Herseth Sandlin also drew on information from discussions with state and federal officials, including her meeting with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator Craig Fugate, to craft this legislation.

“Damaging floods are becoming a yearly occurrence in many places in South Dakota, devastating families and businesses,” Rep. Herseth Sandlin said. “Band-aid approaches aren’t working and this legislation will help South Dakota’s rural communities to take control of the situation and mitigate the risk of future flooding, while improving flood response if flooding does

occur. It provides a comprehensive approach to reduce the yearly impact of flooding on South Dakota and to improve the ability of rural communities to access hazard mitigation assistance.”

The legislation focuses on three main areas:

- Assisting rural and flood-prone communities in accessing flood mitigation programs.
- Helping Native American tribes better manage the effects of repeated flooding and natural disasters.
- Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of federal disaster response

Importantly, the bill reduces the local share for hazard mitigation projects in flood-prone areas to make it easier for small, rural communities to access these programs. Because it doesn't make sense to keep repairing the same roads year after year, the bill would allow counties and local communities to make improvements to roads and other infrastructure so they are protected from flooding in future years. This makes sense for the long-term economic health of both our state and the nation.

For Native American tribes in rural areas, this bill develops programs to increase access to technical assistance needed to better manage federal disasters. The bill also improves tribal access to FEMA's Individual Assistance program so that individuals and families can get the help they need when flooding ruins homes and livelihoods.

In addition, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of FEMA's flood response in rural areas, the bill requires a number of studies on hazard mitigation and recovery programs, including a U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report assessing whether the presidential disaster declaration process is meeting the needs of rural communities and Native American reservations; a FEMA study on improving communication with state and local governments, and a second GAO report on simplifying the application process for hazard mitigation projects.

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